



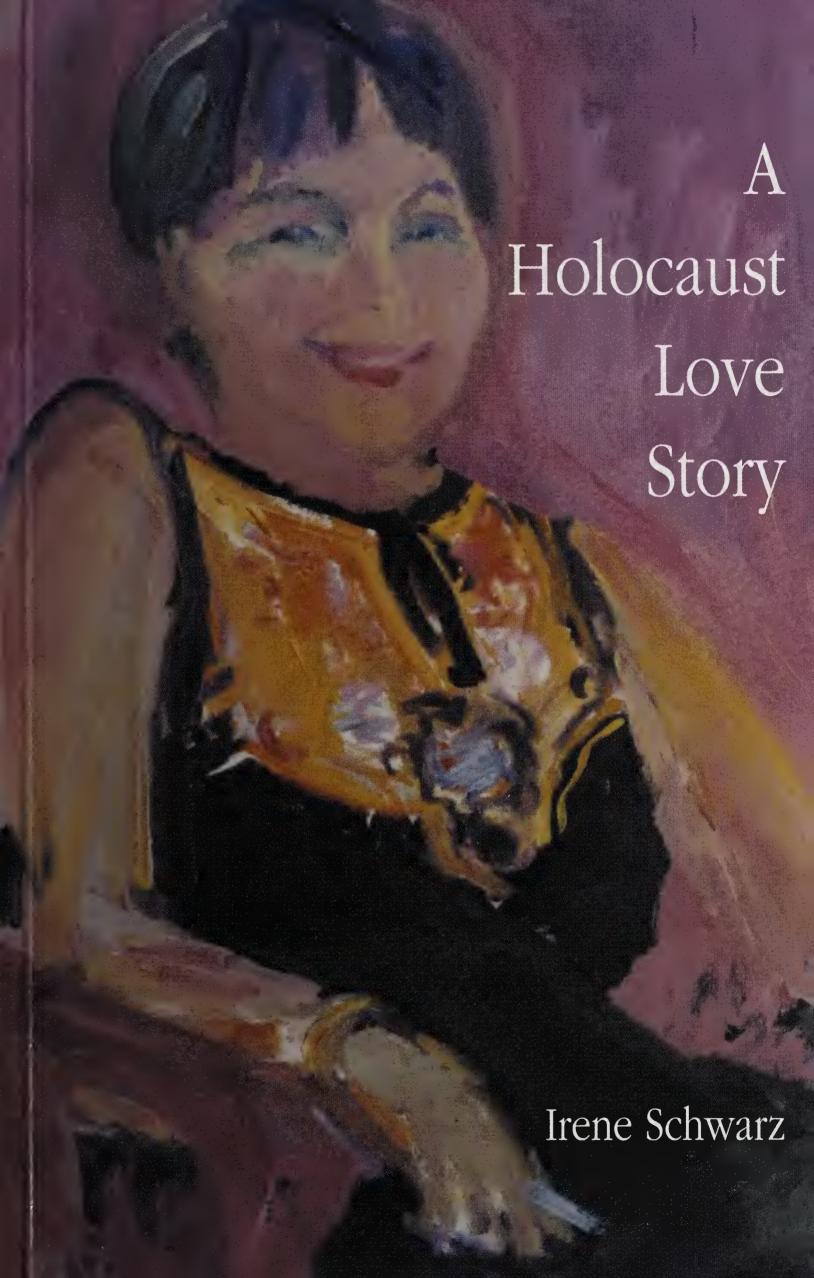
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Holocaust Love Story

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Chapter One

A Woman's Love

The story of Andrzej and Kimo is fundamentally the same story, because it is a story of love. The fact that Andrzej was a man and Kimo a dog does not change that fact. I loved them both. Had I had to choose between them I would have chosen the dog, because a man who forces one to make such a choice does not deserve to be loved by a woman. Andrzej, of course, being who he was, would never have dreamt of proposing such a thing. He loved Kimo too, or perhaps he only liked him or even only tolerated him. He accepted him and my love for him without any reservations.

The story of love I propose to tell you on these pages, gentle reader, is at the same time very simple and most complex. The dog taught me to love, to reach out. To risk pain, to step outside myself. And the man finally was the object of that love – complete, vibrant, full of joy, painful when he suffered, full of desperation when he died. When one loves and the objects of that love are taken away one by one, and only pain remains to survive one decides not to love. It is so much simpler: no love, no pain.

Ever since I can remember I yearned for a dog. Obsessively, the way some women yearn for a child. In Lwow, Poland, where I was born, I brought home all the stray dogs I came across to be cared for tenderly; my parents threw them back on the street the next day. Finally, taking pity on their obsessed child they bought me a cocker spaniel puppy. I was happy – my dreams came true – I had a dog. But it did not last long, for reality intruded. One day the puppy disappeared. I was told it ran away. My world came to an end. I was desperate, I mourned. I hoped that the object of my love would return but it did not. This marked my first loss, my first separation from a beloved being.

As it turned out, the dog had not run away. My parents gave him to our shoemaker. Apparently he was too much trouble for the adults around me and I, being little, could not take care of him. I went on yearning for a dog of my own, but many, many years passed until finally, as an adult, a middle-aged adult, I found my Kimo – my beloved, now long-dead Kimo. Dead, like all the other people who were close to my heart.

Chapter Two

Enter Hitler - The End of My Childhood

Time passes. Hitler invades Poland. The world around me changes. Nothing remains the same. My peaceful, comfortable, even luxurious childhood ends abruptly. The armies of the Soviet Union march in, occupying all of eastern Poland. A new order reigns. No longer allowed to attend the private school for the children of the privileged, I now go to a public school where Ukrainian and Russian are taught. My father, a prominent lawyer before the war, takes a menial job in another town in order not to be deported to Siberia. We see him only on weekends. My mother starts going to work. I become a latchkey child, coming home from school to an empty house and waiting till the evening for my mother to come home. After living in a beautiful, six-room apartment, we are now confined to one room; the kitchen and bathroom are shared with other families, each to a room. Frequent quarrels break out; people are tense, worried and afraid. Could we but have known that that life, which we found so difficult, was paradise compared with what was to come later.

After two years under Soviet occupation, the triumphant armies of the Führer march in. What happens then has been described so many times I will not go into it again. Nobody is ever adequately able to describe the horror of those days, except for my personal story, during what was so aptly called the Holocaust.

My memory of those years, perhaps fortunately, perhaps not, is hazy. I seem to have blanked out many events, yet much of it I remember. I remember remaining in the same room in our old apartment for a while, with the Germans systematically coming every so often with big trucks and looting our possessions, ours and all the other Jews. One day it was the silver, another day the furs, yet another the furniture and so on, till we were stripped, with almost nothing left.

Then there was the ghetto, a section of Lwow, where all the Jewish families were forced to live. We lived in a small room in the apartment of our friends. Food was scarce. There was no heat. There were days during the winter when I stayed in bed all day just to keep warm. A young couple upstairs used to bring their baby and put it to bed with me – we kept each other warm. We were not allowed to leave the ghetto and we wore armbands.

Theoretically, I was to wear one too, but being small for my age, my parents often sent me

outside the ghetto with jewellery or dollars sewn into the hem of my coat. They told me where to go and I would come back with some money. What madness! They risked my life each time they sent me out, but those were desperate times, one took desperate measures.

Time passed and we moved again to another ghetto, smaller this time. It had to contain fewer people. This was outside of town; we shared a little house with two other families - an elderly professor, his wife and son and the demented sister of one of my father's doctor friends. The professor's son soon disappeared, he was young and strong.

And then came a raid that changed my life completely. We were warned that they were coming and we were told to hide. But my mother refused. I don't know why – as long as I live I'll never understand why she refused to hide. My father took me and we hid in a drainage pipe under the ground. After the raid, when we came out, they were gone – my mother, the professor and the demented sister. I remember that my father sat and cried, but for the life of me I don't remember what I did and how I behaved at that moment. Did I cry? Did I scream, or was I calm, because they told me she'd come back? That moment in my life is a

complete blank. It will probably remain so forever.

After that we moved again, my broken father and I, again I don't know why. I have a vague memory of a room in a courtyard, empty with no furniture. We shared the room with a woman and her two sons. My father left it to me to decide with whom to share this room, this woman or the professor's wife from the previous house. Why did I choose this woman? I don't know. Maybe because she was prettier?

She was not good to me at all, ignored me all day and made me wash my half of the floor in that miserable hovel, where at night we all slept on the floor. I remember being alone all day long. My father would go away each morning - he was a member of the Jewish Committee – and come back late at night and bring me a piece of bread and some cheese. That was all the food I had all day. The woman we shared the room with never gave me any of her food. How long we lived like this I again don't remember. It could have been days and could have been weeks. There were rumours that our ghetto was to be closed and liquidated.

Chapter Three

I Am Saved!

And then a great miracle happened! My father had a friend, an artist, a painter of pictures. He in turn had a neighbour, a Polish woman, who lived next door to him with her husband and three children. This painter still lived in his old apartment because he had a beautiful daughter who fraternized with the enemy. My father, in desperation, turned to his friend. "Please help me save my child." And the painter turned to his Polish neighbour. And miracle of miracles - thanks to which I am still here today to tell the tale.

She came to the ghetto, spoke to my father and took me home with her. There are many, many such stories - so simple and yet glorious beyond words. She simply took me home with her to save my life and to risk her own and that of her three children. She took me home, fed me and cleaned me. I was filthy and ridden with lice. That same night we left. She left her husband for her own personal reasons, took her three children and me and we all went to a place called Skarzysko-Kamienna where her father lived.

Her name was Janina Sycz, and her children were Wlodek, Andrzej and Irka. Irka was a year younger than me; Andrzej was my age and Wlodek a few years older. Because there were now two Irenas they decided to call me Relcia. To this day I am Relcia to their children and their children's children.

What came next were four years of utter poverty, fear of betrayal and, at the same time, love, security and what one might call a normal life. At least what in those days passed for a normal life. Friends and neighbours were told that I was the orphaned relation of Mrs. Sycz's husband, whom she was taking care of. Her father was told the same story. Later, he guessed the truth, but came to accept the situation. At that time I was ten years old; when the war broke out I was eight. I was to spend the next four years with my new family – in the beginning total strangers to me, my nearest and dearest when it was all over.

Mrs. Sycz, who was a teacher by profession, took the most menial of jobs. She became a sweeper at the local railroad yards; at night she did sewing for neighbours. With grandfather as the manager and chief cook of our daily zalewajka (a watery potato soup), we, the children, took care of the household chores. The boys carried water in buckets from a well; they went to a nearby forest to get wood, which they chopped and

stacked near the house. We, the girls, made the beds, swept the floors and generally kept the house clean.

There was time to play too - there were other boys and girls in the neighbourhood. We were, after all is said and done, children. And like children everywhere, we forgot the war, the hunger, poverty and fear, and we played.

There were holidays, especially Christmas, when Mrs. Sycz. somehow managed to get a bit of flour and some eggs and bake us a cake, and even get us some very modest gifts. The forest generously provided a Christmas tree. I remember those days with gratitude – I had a home and a family who cared about me. But my parents - where were my parents? I would sometimes go off by myself and imagine that a silhouette on the far-off horizon was my father or my mother coming towards me, and then the figure drew close and I saw that it was not, that it was someone else... I did that again and again, hoping, hoping...

Slowly, the years passed. During the week we worked, we played. On Sundays, all spruced up in our best clothes, all four of us children were sent to church. And gradually I came to like those Sundays - the prayers, the singing, the smell of incense, the sameness of it all and the beauty. I wanted to be a part of it, to belong. Not to be an outsider and different. At some point I decided to convert. I came to my Aunt Sycz with that proposition. I meant to convert and remain with my new family forever. I did not want to undergo another separation, another loss; I did not want to repeat the pain and anguish I still felt after losing my parents.

But Mrs. Sycz remembered her promise to my father, to send me to the US to my family after the war. She was not religious. It was not important to her to acquire one more soul for Jesus. She took me to the bishop and together they explained to me that what I wanted could not be done. I was only 13 and did not know my own mind. I was immature and such decisions had to be undertaken when one is older, perhaps 18. So that was that. I remained the outsider, the Jew in hiding, different...

Some time later, when the Germans decided to open the eastern front and attack Russia, the armies were moved to Poland and the soldiers were quartered in private homes. We had two rooms and a kitchen. Four of us slept in the bigger of the two rooms - the grandfather and small Irka in one bed, Mrs. Sycz and I in another. The boys, Wlodek and Andrzej, shared the smaller room.

Two German soldiers were quartered with us. We gave them the smaller room and all six of us, the whole family, slept in the larger of the two rooms. One of the soldiers was older – about 40 – a married man with a family; the other was younger - about 20 - a medical student and a bachelor, engaged to be married to somebody named Marianne. The older one, an ardent Nazi, was someone we hardly talked to. We were afraid of him and what would happen if he were to discover our secret: a Jewish child being hidden under his very nose.

The younger one, Helmut, was the one who talked to us whenever he could, about everything that weighed on his heart. As he sat in our kitchen, ate our soup and cried bitter tears about his fate, he talked to us about his family and about his Marianne. He talked to us about his hatred for the war, his hatred of the Nazis, his loneliness and his misery.

He was still young enough to participate in our children's games, and he forgot for a while where he was and what he was doing. Had the older German heard some of the things that Helmut said to us, he would have been jailed or even shot. I was 14 at the time and lonely, and I fell in love with Helmut. They stayed with us for about half a year, maybe longer. When the Russian offensive started, they left. For me this meant another separation,

another loss – attachment ending in pain. I don't know if I realized at that time what had happened to me. But the wise eyes of Mrs. Sycz saw everything; she understood and tried to comfort me.

The rest of the time until the war ended was rather uneventful. Tired, hungry and exhausted by the long years of deprivation, we all longed for the war to end. Finally, by the fall of 1945, it was over.

We, the children, thought of the end of the war as something dramatic, where our lives would change for the better the next day. I would finally have my white roll with butter and a velvet dress with a lace collar. I don't remember what the others dreamed of, but we were convinced that as soon as it was all over we would miraculously have what we wanted. But, of course, it was not so. The next day dawned as gray and miserable as the previous one. There was still not enough to eat and nothing to buy and even if goods were available, there was no money to buy them with.

But the war was over and everyone's thoughts turned to creating a "normal life." The Germans were gone and the threat of immediate execution for hiding a Jew did not hang over our heads any longer. Nevertheless, none of the neighbours were told about my true identity. Who knew who among them hated the Jews enough to cause us

harm? We decided not to tell. It was safer. A letter was immediately dispatched to New York to my family there, informing them that I was alive and well, that I alone remained, that my parents were probably dead.

It took many, many months before an answer came - but more about that later in my story. It took almost a year till I was finally able to leave Poland.

In the meantime, rumour had it that schools were about to open and there we were, the four little savages, completely unprepared. We had not had any formal schooling for the past four years. (We had, however, gone to school during the two years that Lwow was occupied by the Russians.) Mrs. Sycz was a teacher, so was her cousin Mrs. J.B. The two of them, with the help of some books obtained G-d only knows where, set to work preparing us for the entrance exams to our respective schools: Irka to the last class of public school, Andrzej and I to the first class of high school, and Wlodek to the second class of high school. We all worked very hard, we all passed and life truly began to be more normal. What helped, I suppose, was that we had all done a lot of reading. Through the dark days of the war, we read all that we could get our hands on. There was not a book in any of the neighbours' or friends' houses that we had not devoured.

I must have been a well-adjusted little girl, despite all that I went through. I did well in school. As a matter of fact, I did very well. All A's and B's – and irony of ironies – I was the best in class in religion and president of my class. Only the priest who taught religion was told that I was Jewish – a decent person, he could be trusted. Andrzej, who was my classmate at that time, my brother, was also among the outstanding students in that class.

And so the months passed. We trudged to school every day on foot, there and back. There were no buses, or trolleys or any other way to get there. Life was becoming "normal."

Finally, came the long-awaited answer from my family in New York. They were starting to make arrangements to bring me there as soon as possible. I immediately decided that I was not going. Again to live through a separation from people I had learned to love and trust, again to face the unknown? New, unknown people. A new country with a strange language, a long trip all alone. Panic, fear, desperation – they all gripped me in turn. I resisted with all my strength. I cried, begged and pleaded – to no avail.

The adults around me decided otherwise. Mrs. Sycz took me to Warsaw to make the arrangements. And one cold winter's day she took me again to Warsaw and put me on a plane to Stockholm. There, friends of my New York family were to meet me. I was to stay with them for a while, while further arrangements were being made to send me to New York. Alone again, afraid of the unknown, lonely for the security my Polish family had given me, I arrived in Stockholm. As fate would have it, the people there mixed up the date of my arrival and there was nobody to meet me. Some passengers from my flight put me in a taxi, sent me to the right address and there I was. A terrified and miserable 13-year-old on their doorstep. One should never, ever take their first plane trip alone - that in itself can scar you for life.

And do you think that my new Swedish friends spoke Polish so that I could at least have the comfort of a familiar language? No, they spoke Swedish, which was completely unknown to me, and German, which one managed to pick up a little, courtesy of the occupiers. There they were, a prosperous Swedish family, a large luxurious apartment in the best neighbourhood of Stockholm.

There was Mr. Hedberg, his wife (who was away at that time working with the Red Cross), and Vali, Mrs. Hedberg's friend, and two little Dutch boys, Piet and Vim, who were there because their family in Holland could not afford to feed them. But at least there was food – everything you could think of and in vast quantities – all you wanted. And the three of us, Piet, Vim and I, ate and ate, to make up for all times.

I spent a month with the Hedbergs; they were good people and they tried very hard. My family in the US sent money. The first thing I did was to go to a department store with Tante Vali and buy warm winter clothes for my Polish family and some clothes for myself. They took me sightseeing; they tried.

After a month Mrs. Hedberg came back – somehow there was no room for me there any more. They placed me in the home of the attaché to the Polish embassy and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Rappaport, he a Jew, she a Roman Catholic. There were two daughters about my age – one at home and the other in a sanatorium near Stockholm suffering from a mysterious malady. So there was an empty bed in the girls' room and there I slept. At least there I was able to talk Polish, to understand and be understood. They were also very kind.

I spent my days trying to learn some English from Linguaphone records and writing interminably

long letters to Poland, describing everything in the minutest detail. Every Sunday I would go to the Hedbergs for lunch, taking a long trolley ride from the outskirts to the centre of town. I cried only once during those two months in Sweden. I tripped on the basement stairs and broke a jar of preserves I was carrying, the flood of tears completely out of proportion to the event precipitating them. There were, in those tears that day, all my feelings of loneliness, alone-ness and desperation.

It was there, in the home of the Rappaports, that I had my first taste of classical music. They listened to it all the time and love for that music remains with me to this day. I spent another month with the Rappaports and, finally, came the day when I had to say goodbye to all my Swedish friends and travel to America.

Mr. Hedberg's son (on whom I had managed to develop a crush) took me by train to Götteborg, where I was to board the Drottningholm, a great big, beautiful, white ship, for a two-week long journey to my unknown family and a new country. An acquaintance of the Hedbergs, a Miss Larsen, was to travel on the same boat and keep an eye on me.

I shared a cabin with three strange women, who fought all the time and ignored me. What saved me was a family of fellow travellers who, having survived one or more concentration camps, were also on their way to the US. There was a mother and her two daughters, one of them my age and the other somewhat older. The mother took me under her wing. I became best friends with Musia the younger daughter, and Judy, the older daughter, became the older sister I never had. To them I owe my sanity during that stormy crossing on the Drottingholm. I attached myself to them and spent my days at their side, leaving them only to go to sleep in my cabin with those three strange women. As for Miss Larsen - seeing that I was taken care of - she left me alone. Besides, we had no common language to speak of!

As for Musia, Judy and their mother, we became lifelong friends. The mother lived to the age of 100 and they buried her in Jerusalem, where she had lived for many years. Judy also has lived in Jerusalem for many years. Musia lives in the US but has an apartment in Jerusalem and spends about half her time there. Both wives, mothers and grandmothers, my dear friends, they have come to my rescue more than once in times of need.

Chapter Four

A New Country

Then the journey was over and our ship docked in New York harbour. There, waiting for me, was my family. Strangers. Complete strangers. There was my grandmother - my mother's mother, my Uncle Leon - my mother's younger brother, and Aunt Sabina – my mother's younger sister and her husband, Uncle Oscar. I was stunned and numb -I was unprepared...

They kissed me, embraced me, and showered me with questions. I saw my first African-American, as they call them now, and I ran after him, pointing and shouting "Negro, Negro!" They caught me and pulled me back.

Then they put me in a car and took me home to begin a new life. My Uncle Leon, then still a bachelor, lived with my grandmother on the Lower East Side, where he had a grocery store. Aunt Sabina and Uncle Oscar lived in Brooklyn on Ocean Avenue. They were both physicians and had no children, so it was decided that I would live with them. Their economic situation was not the greatest, having had to start their medical careers afresh after resettling in a new country.

Uncle Oscar was born in Vienna; he studied and

practiced medicine there. When war broke out, he left an established practice and everything else behind him and came to New York as a refugee with literally one shirt on his back (which he washed every night before going to bed). It took a few years to learn a new language, pass medical boards and start all over again. There was much competition, because at that time many like him came to the US and tried to establish themselves.

Aunt Sabina studied medicine in Prague and was to tell the same story; she had to learn English, pass the boards and establish a practice. They married four years before I arrived, rented a three-bedroom apartment on Ocean Avenue and started their respective careers, he as a cardiologist and she as a gynaecologist and obstetrician. They brought me to this apartment, where they both lived and worked.

Since every room fulfilled a double, sometimes triple function, I ended up sleeping on a couch in a small room that served as an additional waiting room for the patients during the day, and a TV room in the evening. My desk was in the corner of their bedroom and my clothes in a closet in a wide hallway, which served as the main patients' waiting room. G-d help me if I wanted to change my clothes during the day!

During my years in Skarzysko and probably before, when I walked a lot I would sometimes feel pain in my hip joints. But the war was on who paid attention to such things? When I arrived in New York, my family noticed that I sometimes limped. They took me to their friend, an orthopedic surgeon; x-rays were taken and a diagnosis of shallow acetabulum was made. He recommended an immediate operation while my bones were still growing; another year and it would be too late.

So that's how I spent my first summer in my new country. I lay there in a full cast from above my waist down to my tiptoes, in a New York summer, before air-conditioning. The heat was unbearable. I lived through it only because I was young and healthy and because they tried so hard to reduce my discomfort. I lay in a private room with a private nurse, who all day long wiped those parts of my body not covered by the cast, with a mixture of water and alcohol. Finally the torture ended, the cast came off and my family triumphantly took me home to Brooklyn. But I could not walk. So there came the long slow process of learning to use my legs again. Many hours of physical therapy, many months on crutches, till finally I was able to walk with a cane and then finally unaided.

And that's how I started high school in September 1946, on crutches with a few words of English and with a long braid down my back. There were so many new things to learn all at once. I had to get to know my family, a new way of life at home, my new country, a new language, how to walk and how to survive in an American high school where everybody knew everybody and I knew no one.

Musia and her family lived nearby, also in Brooklyn, but she went to a different high school. For a long time they were my only friends till I met Esther. She was a refugee from Vilna; she and her parents survived by spending the war in Siberia. She came to New York about the same time as I did, but she was less damaged than I was. She still had both her parents and she could walk. Otherwise, we were in the same boat.

So I had another friend. As with Musia, our friendship has survived to this day. As I write this I have reached the ripe age of 68. I live in Netanya, Israel. Esther and her husband Walter, a renowned pianist, live in New York. We visit from time to time and call each other often. When one gets old, when there is less pressure of work and family obligations, one can sit down in a quiet corner, reflect, remember and try to write it all

down. A life, a lifetime of few joys and many sorrows, yet worth living and, let us hope, worth writing down for others to read.

And so there I was in high school, trying very hard to keep up, to perfect my English and to be among the best students, to please my Aunt Sabina. The pressure on me in those days was tremendous. I had to learn not only to walk like everybody else, but also to swim (one could not graduate without it), to ride a bicycle, to play tennis and to ski. No one asked me what I felt, what I thought or what I wanted. So I tried hard to please, to earn their love, and I performed.

Graduating at 17 with honours, a member of Arista and various other clubs, I also acquired a boyfriend, Buddy, whom I met at a dance at a Jewish centre in the neighbourhood. Buddy, unfortunately for him, fell in love and wanted to get married. He was a few years older than me, never went to college, held down a prosaic job and lived with his mother. I did not reciprocate his feelings. I kept going out with him - it flattered me that an older man was seriously interested in me. I was also advised by my Aunt Sabina to go out, have a good time and, when I was ready to go to college, to break off the relationship and forget about it. It also gave my Aunt Sabina an opportunity to brag to her best friend Ana about all the fabulous places my boyfriend took me, and to compare notes on the success of her daughter. How cold-blooded and unfeeling it all was! Who then considered his feelings? Poor Buddy – and what about my feelings?

In those days of outward success and presumed happiness on my part, came the summer, and I was sent off to some camp in the Catskills, where Ana's daughter, Rosalie, had been a camper since she was a small child. At the age of 15, there I was again, the freak, the outsider. I was too old to be a camper, too young to be a counselor. The other girls of my age were waitresses, but I could not be one because I was still on crutches.

Bored to death with nothing to do all day long, not knowing anybody (all the girls knew each other since they were small), I spent two lonely, miserable months at that place. I must have refused to go there again because the following summer was spent in summer school, so I could graduate early and beat Rosalie to the punch, according to the plans of my Aunt Sabina, in constant competition with her friend Ana. So I graduated at 17 and Rosalie at 18. G-d forgive my Aunt Sabina – I imagine that she meant well. She suffered enough later on for her ambitions.

Chapter Five

Breakdown, Marriage - and Divorce

Finally, it was time for college. Rosalie was going to Michigan State University.

Amongst others, the University of Michigan, a far more prestigious institution, accepted me. Michigan, which was so far away from New York, my family and my two dear friends, Musia and Esther.

It was a tremendous campus, thousands and thousands of undergraduate and graduate students milling around. Again I knew no one, I was alone and lost. I met Kurt at a Hillel mixer and I fell in love. Deeply, completely, the way one does for the first time at the age of 17! He was a graduate student, brilliant, handsome and charming. We went to concerts, we took walks, we talked. There was that first passionate kiss. And that was all - no words of love, no commitment as they say today.

My frustration was total. I could not study, I cried, I made desperate phone calls home. I became friends with Flossie, a nice, stable girl from Cleveland. She tried to help, but what could she do? She could not really understand what was happening to me. Finally, I completely fell apart. Inability to concentrate, sleepless nights and poor appetite – all took their toll and my grades plummeted. After a few days in the school infirmary, my Aunt Sabina flew up and took me home to Brooklyn. I could not explain what was happening to me.

My family was beginning to gather that things were not as great with me as they seemed. I was finally beginning to crack. The long-delayed reaction to all that had gone on until now finally appeared. So they took me to a psychiatrist and what he said to them I don't know. I think he advised a long rest at home. So I rested; I did nothing. I ate, I slept, I cried and then, one fine morning, I woke up and it was all over! I felt fine, my mood was gone – I was full of energy, enthusiasm and love of life. I had come home in the spring of that year and by the fall I was ready for college again.

This time it was Adelphi College in Garden City, New York. An hour on the train and I was home where I could see my family and my two friends, Musia and Esther. Life was good again. Adelphi College was small and it was near home. I roomed off campus in a private home with a strange girl named Riva, who was adopted and constantly talked about it. I also finally became "normal" as far as boys were concerned. I dated Kurt from time to time. I still

loved him but the intensity and anguish were gone.

There was also Harry, who took me to concerts at Lewisohn Stadium. It was all fun, it was all pleasant, but I think that in those days, after my "breakdown," I erected some sort of emotional barrier against intimacy, which was to remain with me for many years. It was with me till I was well into my 50s, when Kimo and Andrzej finally shattered it. But more about that later.

In the meantime, my friends were laying the foundations for serious, permanent relationships. We were all 18 - it was time. Musia became engaged to Arnold, who is her husband to this day. Esther was seeing Walter, attending Hunter College and living securely at home with her parents. They planned to marry after her graduation. They too are together to this day. Both couples are parents twice over and happy grandparents. I remain alone, with my memories.

Life at Adelphi passed by pleasantly. This time it was me who wanted to go to college. I studied for myself - French, literature and modern dance in which I delighted. Those were also the years when I was discovering who I was in a wider sense of the word but, more specifically, I was rediscovering my Jewishness. There was the summer I spent at Brandeis Institute in North

Carolina, learning Jewish history and customs, Hebrew songs and dances, and the history of modern Israel. I met Whitey there (so nicknamed because of his white skin and light hair). He was also from New York, so upon our return home we spent many a pleasant evening together dancing at the Astor Hotel.

A two-week seminar at an Intercollegiate Zionist Federation of America camp near Philadelphia widened my "Jewishness" and it was there that I met Danny, my future husband. I was then 19 years old, more stable than I had ever been, more aware of who I was and what I wanted. What I wanted most at that time was to settle down, have my own home and to lead some sort of life of my own apart from my family.

Not yet secure enough to do it on my own, I needed the security of another human being close to me. After all, most of my friends went straight from the homes of their parents to husbands and homes of their own. Why not me? So I decided that I too wanted to get married and that Danny would be my husband. Not taking into consideration that my friends' choices were decided upon with much more deliberation and with a more mature and serious outlook on life, I plunged into marriage on what today I would call a whim.

Danny was a most pleasant young man, bright and good-looking. Born in Camden, New Jersey, he was from a solid middle-class background. He was a pre-med student at Rutgers and wanted to be a veterinarian. We went out together for about a year. He would come in from Rutgers, I from Adelphi and we spent our weekends together, mostly in New York. Marriage was the furthest thing from his mind. He had to finish college, do four years of veterinary school and then think of settling down. But I wanted a commitment. I was afraid that I would form an emotional attachment and it would end as it did with Kurt - pain and grief.

So I gave Danny an ultimatum. Either we get engaged or we break off our relationship. Apparently, he cared enough for me to choose the former. And so we became engaged. I had my security blanket. I was still seeing Kurt from time to time and hoped against hope that upon hearing of my engagement, he would declare his love and beg me to be his. But nothing like that happened. He accepted my engagement, wished me luck and that was that.

Did I love Danny? I guess in my own needy way I did. He was my stability, my security and my home base. My love for Danny had nothing in it of the wild, tempestuous feeling I had felt for Kurt. It was calm, there was a lot of liking in it; I though that was enough. That our backgrounds were so dissimilar did not bother me one bit. The wedding was quite lavish, with all the trimmings, as they say. Part of my wedding night was spent crying for my mother, I so wanted her to have been there.

Afterwards, we took a lovely trip through the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, visiting the Luray Caverns on our way. When we returned to Philadelphia at the beginning of the summer of 1951, we rented a small apartment near the University of Pennsylvania and both got summer jobs. In September, Danny started veterinary school and I continued in my junior year majoring in psychology. And so the years went by. On the surface all seemed fine, but in me there was this longing for something else, a sense of frustration and disappointment, a feeling of emptiness.

Between Danny's junior and senior years at veterinary school, he had to do an internship, a summer of practical work. Since I had just graduated college and Danny wanted to do his practical work in Israel, our proud parents treated us to a trip through Europe, plus two months in Israel. So off we went, travelling through England, Holland and France by train and finally sailing to Israel

from France. There we stayed for a while with Uncle Oscar's younger brother and with the respective parents of Danny's friends in Philadelphia -Jonathan and Sarah Adler.

Danny was busy working on various kibbutzim with the Veterinary Service and I was free to explore the country. So I took a few organized bus trips and that way got to see almost all of Israel. On one of those excursions I met someone, I fell in love and the inevitable followed. I will not, at this point, justify my behaviour, nor will I look for excuses. What happened, happened. It was, as I said before, almost inevitable. Our backgrounds were similar. G. too was from Poland and spent the war there in hiding. His mother, like the rest of his family, perished in the Holocaust. He and his father survived the war, emigrated to England where his father remained, and both he and G. led a comfortable middle-class life in London.

Danny went alone to Cornell to get a PhD in physiology and I returned to Brooklyn, back to my family, broken in spirit and suffering from a major depression, completely unable to function. I could not eat, I could not sleep. All I did was cry all day. The marriage was over; all that was left to do was get a divorce. That last year together, after we returned from Israel, was torture. I was torn

between the two of them, one day wanting to remain with Danny and another wanting desperately to be with G.

Danny asked me to remain with him during his last year in Veterinary School. Our families were to be told nothing of what happened, only after that year was over, if we decided to get a divorce. I agreed, either because of guilt or because I was not quite sure myself what I wanted.

Chapter Six

Depression

When we finally separated and subsequently divorced, my hell began in earnest. I could not imagine a human being could endure such years of mental anguish and torture as I suffered. My family was supportive up to a point. They gave me a home and they provided medical care. Yet in their attitude towards me, there was a fundamental lack of understanding mixed with shame. They were all busy with their own lives and I was alone.

All my friends abandoned me, except for Musia who, having undergone post-partum depression understood what I was going through and came to visit me from time to time. Later on I met Blanche, also a Holocaust survivor from Poland, also undergoing a major depression. We became close friends, saw each other often and tried to help one another on the road to recovery. We're in touch to this day, albeit lately only by telephone.

As I said before, those were the dark days of my soul. When the paralyzing depression lifted a little, I developed a phobia, a fear of being alone. Whenever I had to remain alone at home or go anywhere on my own I was seized by such horrible panic attacks, that I thought I would die. Accompanied (but only by an adult member of my family), I could go anywhere, but alone I could not take one step out of the house. I therefore became a double prisoner of my depression and my phobia. Nothing helped – not that so many forms of therapy were tried. My family gave up on me. They were resigned to having me around as I was, forever.

One of the worst side effects of my prolonged illness was boredom. While suffering from depression, it was hard for me to concentrate. I would do nothing for months. All I could do was watch TV and that was possible only in the evenings. To be resigned to total emptiness, to total lack of activity and contact with people outside the family, only deepened my depression. When that somewhat eased and I was more able to function, albeit now limited by the phobia, I started to work as my aunt and uncle's secretary. I answered the phone, took care of the correspondence, ordered supplies.

Finally, when Aunt Sabina bought a sewing machine, I taught myself to sew. It was the sewing that saved my sanity. I could sit and sew from morning till night. I became so good at it that I started producing the most beautiful dresses for Aunt Sabina and myself; later on I also made dresses for Aunt Ruth (the wife of Uncle Leon) and their two daughters, Jackie and Sharon.

And so the years passed. An apartment next door to us became empty. My aunt and uncle immediately rented it, connected the two and finally I was less confined. At last there was a part of the house out of bounds to the patients of my aunt and uncle. There I was, in the company of Willie, our devoted housekeeper, who was with us for 30 years. Thank G-d for Willie - I felt good with her and secure. She was home all day long, otherwise how would I have been able to stand it when Aunt Sabina and Uncle Oscar had to go out to the hospital or see a patient at home? And so the years passed - many years.

Israel was there, somewhere beyond the horizon, until that fateful day when she won a war, the Six Day War in June 1967, and was catapulted to the front pages of the newspapers and the consciousness of the world. The complacency of US Jewry was shaken. Everybody was suddenly interested in Israel. In December 1967, Aunt Sabina decided to take a trip there and to take me with her. Oh Glory! After all those years of confinement I was to get on a plane, see another country, be with people and see something of the world! For ten days I was going to do something "normal." I was to be "normal." The trip, an organized excursion, was to consist of ten days in Israel and three days in Greece at the end.

I was thrilled beyond words. I was in seventh heaven. I will not go into details of the various visits to different parts of the country. It was all new and thrilling – exciting beyond words. And then the strangest thing happened – and such a thing is possible – I fell in love with Israel. I began to love, passionately, its people, its houses, its streets. I finally felt at home. I finally found my place in the universe and swore to come again...by any means possible.

My depression was gone but the phobia was still with me. So I could not come alone, it had to be with somebody. I had started to get compensation (Wiedergutmachung) from Germany at that time. So I started saving every dollar of that blood money with one goal in mind - to get to Israel again and again. That is all I wanted at that time, to walk on its soil, to breathe the air, to be among Jews. I had never had that feeling in Poland and never in the US.

The following summer, Aunt Ruth, inspired by my enthusiasm, decided to see Israel too. So she took her two daughters and me, and off we went for two glorious summer months. We rented an apartment in Bat Yam and spent our days on the beach, visiting Aunt Ruth's various friends from her days in Hashomer Hatzair and my newly

found first cousin Moshe and his family, who lived in Ramat Gan. When my Uncle Leon and his cousin Lucien arrived for two weeks, we rented a tourist car with a driver-guide and visited every corner of Israel again.

Chapter Seven

Coming "Home"

And so my visits "home" continued for nine years after the first visit. The last two visits had a more concrete character. After Uncle Oscar died in 1971, I persuaded Aunt Sabina that she should settle in Israel as soon as she retired. After some soulsearching she agreed. We spent the last two years, before we made aliya, searching for an appropriate apartment.

We finally settled on a two-bedroom apartment in Netanya, in a new building just being built. It was to be ready in January 1974. Aunt Sabina planned to retire in December 1973, so everything fitted. After all those years, I was going to have my own room in an apartment in Israel! I was happy, truly happy - the dark night of my soul seemed to be almost over.

We arrived in January 1974 on a very rainy and gloomy day and had to stay in a hotel for a month because the container with all our belongings was delayed in coming to Haifa port. Although the apartment was ready and waiting for us, it was completely empty. Finally, that too was over. The container arrived; we arranged the apartment to our satisfaction and started going together to ulpan to learn Hebrew. Life was pleasant, I was happy despite the fact that my nemesis, the phobia, was still with me.

Then one fine day a miracle happened. I started walking down the street and I kept going, without fear, without panic attacks! The next day the same thing happened, and then again and again... I was free. I was normal, I was like other people. I could go to places alone, I could remain home alone, I could do anything I wanted.

To this day I don't know exactly how it all happened. Perhaps it is simplistic to say that coming to live in Israel caused this tremendous change in me, but it is the only explanation that I have and that will have to do. Now that I could move freely and knew basic Hebrew, it was time to do something else that was "normal" and that was to find a job. So after a while I found one that suited me perfectly. I taught English at a private school for adults in the afternoons and evenings. So it was ulpan in the morning, home for dinner, then from 3.00 to 10.00 pm my school, which I was enjoying tremendously. Finally, after all those wasted years, I was doing something which brought money, pleasure and heightened selfesteem. And then on top of it all I found my Kimo.

There I was, coming down each morning to

feed what I called "my cats" with bread and milk, when one day, instead of the usual group of cats, there was the most beautiful puppy, white with brown spots. He chased away all the cats, ate all their food and appropriated their corner of the yard for himself. The next day he was there again and the next and the next. I forgot about the cats, he now became mine.

Noticing that he limped, I took him to a veterinarian and that kindly man (who is my veterinarian to this day) stopped by our yard every day to give the poor puppy an antibiotic injection. Apparently, one of his legs was broken and, due to neglect, the infection had spread through all his bones. I had, by then, told Aunt Sabina all about Kimo (we named him together) and she went with me to the veterinarian for the second time where, together, they arrived at the diagnosis - osteomyelitis.

We started to bring him up to the apartment, started to housebreak him, and finally adopted him. He became my dog, my love, my joy. After all those years of wanting a dog, of longing for one, I had my Kimo. It was fortunate that Aunt Sabina did not object too strenuously. Had she done so, I would have moved out and taken Kimo with me. It is hard to describe the tremendous love I felt for that animal. It was as if, suddenly,

the floodgates of my heart opened up and all the pent-up affection I was not able to express in all those years, poured out onto the poor creature. I doted on him. He ate with me, slept with me, sat on my lap for hours, he covered me with kisses. He did not leave my side...he was the love of my life, the apple of my eye.

Aunt Sabina was 72 years old when she had a massive heart attack and died. She was on the way to her beloved ulpan when it happened. They took her to the hospital, but it was too late and she died there. She had complained of not feeling well two days before but after a night in the emergency ward, where she was pronounced fit, she was sent home. Whose fault was it that a heart condition was overlooked? I blamed myself, I blamed her (she was, after all, a doctor) and finally those responsible, the hospital physicians.

But it happened, she was gone. She was a valiant woman who had loved me all her life in her own way. Thank you, Aunt Sabina, for being there for me in my darkest hours and in my joys. Uncle Leon and Aunt Ruth came for the funeral, stayed three weeks and left. I was alone. For the first time in my life, completely alone. Except for my Kimo, my darling, faithful animal, who sat on my lap and licked the tears off my face.

Generously, Aunt Sabina made me heir to our apartment and to all her savings. I realized that from that day on, I would no longer have any financial worries as long as I lived. Thank you again, Aunt Sabina.

For a whole year after she died, I experienced the strangest symptoms of heart disease, no less frightening than the real thing, although they were purely hysterical. Every few days I went to the doctor or called one to come to my home and examine me. Eventually, as time passed, that too subsided. I continued working, I had a beautiful apartment, financial security and my beloved animal.

Gradually, being alone turned into something positive. I was now "on my own," I was my own person. Suddenly I was the one responsible, I was the one who made all the decisions concerning my life. I answered to no one - I was my own boss! I decided to sell the living room furniture and buy something more to my taste, to re-do the kitchen and, finally, after about a year, to sell the apartment and buy a new one. After getting stuck in the elevator about five times, I was thoroughly sick of living on the fifth floor, and reasoned that if I lived on the first floor, I would not be in need of that modern contraption.

So I started looking around and found a new building going up a few streets away, with a beautiful apartment available on the first floor. After a year, Kimo and I moved in, convinced that now all would be well. But I was wrong. My nemesis was a vicious looking large Doberman running around loose. I was convinced that one day he would attack my Kimo and bite him to death. After politely asking the owner to put him on a leash to no avail, I turned to the police. The owner did walk the beast on a leash, but only in and around my building.

I could only walk Kimo when the other dog was home. I was desperate. It had been no mean feat to sell one apartment and to buy another one, all by my lonely self. Strangely enough, my builder came to me one day with a proposition. He was building private homes with gardens on the outskirts of Netanya, and he asked me if I would be interested? Well, dear reader, I made up my mind to move again, after only a year and a half in the new apartment. It took about a year till the new homes were ready and, during that year I would put Kimo in the car, go to the building site, let him do his business and see how the construction was progressing.

Finally, the houses were ready in December 1984 and soon after, we moved in. Kimo had his

own garden, where he could run around all day long and attend to his needs when the spirit moved him. And I, I was finally free of those horrible, dangerous and uncomfortable walks. I am in that house to this day; Kimo is long gone and buried in his garden, and other dogs now enjoy its greenery. But there is more to tell, before we come to that. There is still the story of Andrzej the heart of the matter.

Chapter Eight

Full Circle

The story of Andrzej could probably be a separate tale, were it not so interwoven with the rest of my life. As I wrote before, we spent four years together as brother and sister. There was nothing special in our relationship then. Between the ages of 10 and 14 we lived side by side, with Wlodek and Irka, playing and occasionally fighting, as children will do. After the war, when we went to high school, we were in the same class, because we were the same age.

After I left for the US, their mother, in her long letters, kept me informed about the lives of her three children. I knew that Andrzej, always a brilliant student, went on to university, where he earned a doctorate in physics and astronomy. He married, had two daughters and worked as a lecturer at the University of Gliwice, where he lived with his family. Our contacts were infrequent, the occasional letter, the odd photo. Mrs. Sycz did most of the writing. We, the children, had minimal contact with one another.

After Mrs. Sycz died, I invited Irka for a sixmonth visit to Netanya. During that time we wrote to Yad Vashem asking them to bestow the title of Righteous Gentile on Mrs. Sycz. They agreed, and when Irka came to visit me the second time, there was a lovely ceremony, during which she read a touching speech and planted a tree in memory of her mother.

After Irka had been to Israel three times on rather long visits, I decided to invite Andrzej. I had heard that he was separated from his wife and lived alone in Gliwice. Reluctantly, as by now we were total strangers to one another, I invited him for only a month, thinking that if we had nothing in common, at least it would not be a long visit. He came in the fall of 1987. I went to the airport to meet him. And there he was – taller than I imagined him, slim, blond and handsome.

I had no inkling then of what was to come. I had no idea that there before me stood the love of my life, a man who would later leave the most profound impression on my life and leave me grieving for him for years after his untimely death.

Well, as you might guess, the short visit of one month extended to five. We managed to find many, many things in common, to fall in love and to become lovers. It was as if we had waited all those years for one another - both emotionally unencumbered and both ready for a new and fresh relationship. There we were, two middle-

aged people of 56, falling in love like youngsters. But it was good, it was so good. The delight of it and the wonder. We spent the months of his visit exploring the country, visiting every corner of Israel and talking, talking - getting to know each other all over again.

We made plans. Andrzej would go back to Poland in January, put his affairs in order, apply for early retirement and then come back to Israel in the fall and spend his time painting, his now allconsuming passion. But to be separated from him for so many months was too much for me. In April, I could no longer stand the separation. I took a plane and went to Poland. First, there was a grand reunion in Irka's apartment in Warsaw, with Irka and Wlodek, and then Andrzej and I went on to Gliwice, where we spent a blissful month together.

While Andrzej was at work, I tried to bring some semblance of order to his untidy apartment. By nature a bit sloppy and disorganized, Andrzej had spent his days painting, not paying much attention to the more mundane aspects of life. After coming back to Netanya I missed being with him and in July, I again went to Gliwice, this time for a month and a half. Andrzej had an exhibition of his drawings of Jerusalem just then, which turned out to be most successful, and which I attended with him.

Finally, in October, he came to stay. At the same time his older daughter Malgosia, who lived in Holland, came for a visit with her first-born, brand new baby girl, Saskia. How easy it is to say, of our time together then, that we were happy. How elusive is that word "happy." It was late summer, the weather was delightful. We spent most days at the beach, and evenings sitting in the garden and talking, watching little Saskia playing with Kimo. After a few weeks, Malgosia left and we remained alone in Netanya: Andrzej, Kimo and I. Andrzej took up painting again, I went back to my house-wifely duties and Kimo thrived.

And thus followed the next four years, which again can be described by that hapless word "happy." Andrzej spent his days painting with passion. The colours of his canvas became brighter, more colourful under the influence of the Mediterranean sun. We took many trips together. There was a delightful trip to Egypt, a month in New York where we explored Manhattan, with everything it had to offer. Especially fascinating were the museums, where Andrzej could spend hours, day after day. Then followed a nice, long trip through Switzerland and Italy with Andrzej's younger daughter, Justyna. While we were travelling, Kimo spent his days in very good kennels in nearby Kfar Yedidia.

During those four years, I wrote a letter to Yad Vashem and asked that Mrs. Sycz's children, Wlodek, Andrzej and Irka, also receive the title of Righteous Gentiles, since their lives too were endangered by their mother's decision to take me in. My request was granted. There was a modest ceremony at Yad Vashem at which Andrzej received his title, and letters were sent to Irka and Wlodek informing them of that decision. The title of Righteous Gentile, for those living in Israel, is accompanied by a handsome monthly government grant, which was welcomed by Andrzej, who could hardly have managed on his Polish retirement pension.

We took our happiness for granted by now. And the gods became jealous. In January 1991, Andrzej, who had until now been perfectly healthy, suddenly started to feel unwell. There were those vague "travelling" pains in his arms and upper part of his body. We visited the doctor, who at first did not treat the situation at all seriously. X-rays revealed some sort of growth on one of his upper ribs. More visits to doctors, more tests, a biopsy. Finally, the diagnosis - an incurable blood cancer, multiple myeloma.

We were told it could be treated; nobody said it could be cured. The nightmare had started. Next followed four gruelling years of visits to the haematology department of Tel Hashomer Hospital, one of the best in Israel. About once a month we would spend the whole day there. Andrzej underwent various tests and a few hours of chemotherapy, after which we would get home exhausted. There were courses of radiation and a few occasions when he had to be hospitalized for a few days.

The disease got better, then worse, then better again. Andrzej took it all very bravely; he never complained. If he was afraid, he did not show it. He stopped painting and plunged into the translation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin from Russian into Polish. The translation took him exactly four years, as long as he was ill. It was published a few months before his untimely death. Throughout the whole time he was sick, we became even closer to each other than before. We desperately clung to each other, as if sensing there was not much time left. At the same time, we made plans for our old age, believing that whatever they were doing at Tel Hashomer would prolong his life indefinitely and give us our golden years together.

Andrzej died in December 1995. He started feeling worse, had pains in his bones for which he was given small doses of morphine. A course of radiation was started. It lowered his immunity. Somehow he caught pneumonia. With a high temperature, I took him by ambulance to Tel Hashomer. I was told he would get better in a few days on antibiotics. It was on Friday evening about midnight when they sent me home. Why did I listen? On Saturday morning there was a phone call from the hospital that his condition had worsened. By the time I got to the hospital, where my friend Dr. Vera Lechtman was waiting for me, Andrzej was gone... He was 64 years old. May he rest in peace.

Malgosia came for the funeral. Irka and Justyna did not make it. If it were not for Vera Lechtman, the arrangements that follow who made all someone's death, I could not have coped. The following week, including the funeral, remains a blur in my memory. People came and went all week, there was Malgosia crying. They put me in a car, drove me to the cemetery, brought me back and all the time the shock of it and the pain.

Kimo, too, died. Much earlier, in April 1992. The poor thing was 14 years old and developed a heart condition, his lungs filled with fluid, and he had to be put to sleep. Andrzej held him on his lap while the veterinarian slipped the needle into his vein. We buried him in the garden. I mourn them both to this day. I am alone now – all those dear to my heart are gone. A year after Kimo died, Andrzej and I bought two beautiful cocker spaniel puppies. Kumi is raven black, and Kima a light beige colour.

We thought Andrzej would live on for a long time, that the doctors could cope with his illness. Those dogs were to be our companions in our golden years. They are still with me, merry and bright.

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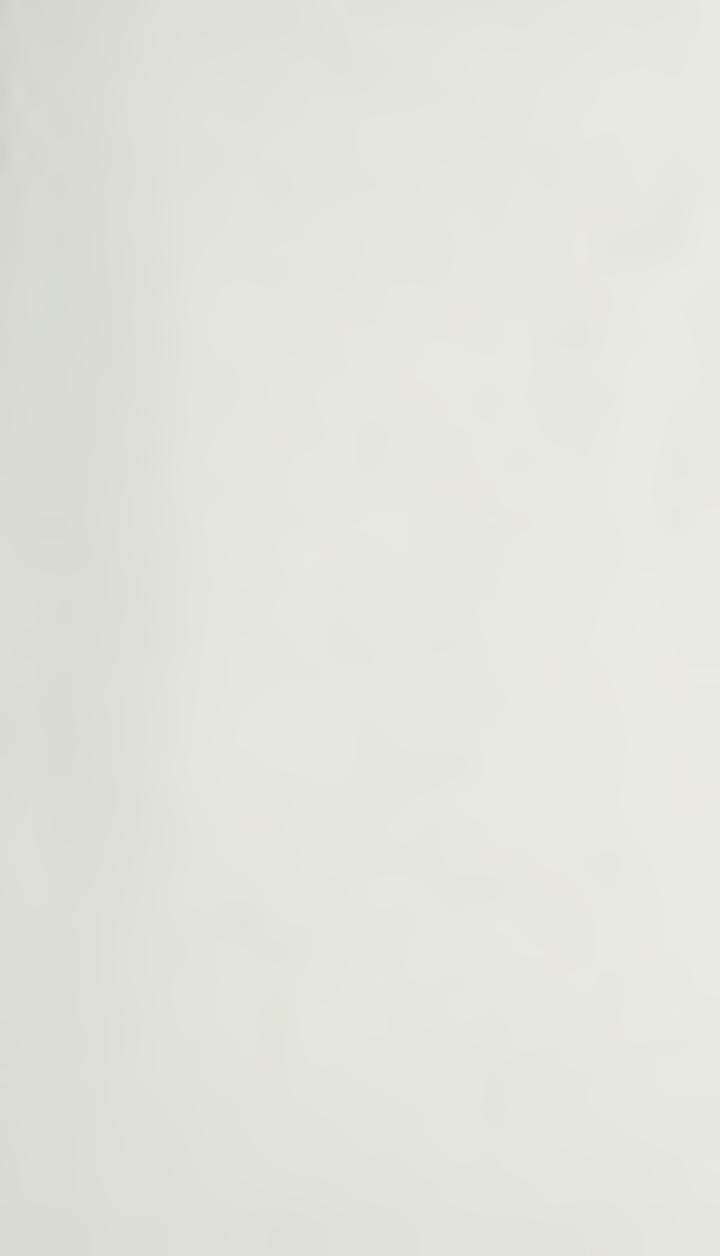
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In the Indian summer of her life, Irene, a Jewish Holocaust survivor falls in love with Andrezj, the son of her Polish Gentile saviour.

This is a story of love between Irene, Andrezj the man, and Kimo the dog. A bond that will bind their souls forever...

A story that spans four countries. As a child in Poland, Irene's parents buy her a cocker spaniel, but soon give the dog away. Irene's first separation. Many many years were to pass before Irene could transfer that love to another dog – Kimo.

In the horrors of the Holocaust, Irene loses both parents but is saved by a very courageous Polish Gentile woman.

To show her gratitude, and in her young mind to avoid future separations, the young girl expresses her wish to convert to Catholicism. Both her 'mother,' and the local priest convince her to stay Jewish.

Lonely and bewildered, Irene arrives in Sweden on her way to the United States. In the New World, she undergoes a period of adjustment as she tries to become a 'normal' person. Soon, her traumas begin to take their toll. After a short marriage and divorce, she starts to adjust again.

Finally, she finds peace in Israel. Having kept in touch with her Polish 'family,' she invites Andrezj for a visit. As he steps from the plane, it is as if their fate is set. After a few years of happiness together 'the gods become jealous,' and Andrezj is smitten with a terminal disease.

Today, Irene is left with her memories, and two new cocker spaniels, Kumi and Kima, fill her life.